## **I-READ**

Indiana's Reading Excellence Action Demonstration

# I-READ Presentation to the Education Roundtable May 25, 2004

#### MARY ANDIS:

I'm Dr. Mary Andis, the Director of I-READ, which is a \$25, 225,140 three-year federal grant, running from August 3, 2001 to August 2, 2004.

I am pleased to be here today to give you a brief update on the current findings.

I-READ is not the same as Reading First. I-READ was funded under the Reading Excellence Act—the legislation prior to No Child Left Behind.

On Friday, I will post the Interim Update on the I-READ Web site--located on the IDOE home page (www.doe.state.in.us).

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

#### MARY ANDIS:

In the spring of 2001, the Education Roundtable supported the application for the grant by forming a Reading and Literacy Partnership. Then, the Partnership created an REA Management Team that has provided oversight of state-level activities.

I wish to thank Governor Kernan, Dr. Reed, and the members of the Roundtable for their support throughout these past three years. And I wish to give a special thanks to Michael Downham, Bob Marra, David Shane, and Linda Singer--all have served at various times on the REA Management Team as representatives for the Roundtable.

## **PURPOSE OF I-READ**

#### MARY ANDIS:

The purpose of the grant is to improve literacy in K-3 classrooms of high-poverty, low-achievement schools by focusing instruction on scientific based reading research in a comprehensive reading program anchored in Indiana's academic standards for the language arts (i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening).

In the spring of 2002 following a rigorous competition, \$23,213,000 was awarded to 81 schools across 32 Indiana counties. The average award per school was \$319,175.

To date, the funds have benefited over 21,000 primary school children and 940 K-3 teachers.

#### **ISTEP+ FINDINGS**

#### MARY ANDIS:

The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy in Bloomington is currently analyzing the ISTEP+ data for I-READ schools. Since all other states receiving REA grants have not reported statistically significant gains or losses, it will not be unexpected if I-READ has a similar inconclusive result. Why is this? Because research says it takes 5 to 6 years to see the impact of a new program. Because I-READ data is only one piece of all the grants and programs a school usually has to juggle.

An analysis, however, of the patterns of continuous improvement on the Grade 3 ISTEP+ in individual schools has resulted in identifying **21 Demonstration Schools**—exemplary models of literacy programs. I will post these on the I-READ Web site on Friday.

Westlawn Elementary School in Jay County is one of the 21 Demonstration Schools and a wonderful example of all the Demonstration Schools. Westlawn has used I-READ funds, along with other grants, to benefit its school community and to forge a university partnership with the Purdue Literacy Collaborative for ongoing professional development. This spring, Westlawn was honored nationally by receiving a 2004 Exemplary Reading Program Award from the International Reading Association.

I have asked Gary Storie, Linda Burkhardt, and Donna Geesamen here today to share their insights on how the I-READ grant has helped Westlawn improve its literacy achievement scores.

### Westlawn Elementary School, Dunkirk, IN

Jay School Corporation, Jay County

## GARY STORIE, Principal:

On behalf of those of us who are here, and the entire Westlawn school community back in Dunkirk, I wish to express our gratitude for the opportunity to be here and have the chance to share with you the wonderful things that are happening at our school. We are thrilled to be a part of Dr. Andis' report about the success of the I-READ program in Indiana.

On a recent survey I was asked to answer the question, "For your building what aspect of the I-READ program has been most successful?" There are a lot of ways it has been successful—our students are better readers and writers, our staff development is more meaningful, our parents are more involved, our school climate and morale are very high, we are very proud, and the list goes on. . .But, most of all, the largest success pertains to what will continue long past the money from this grant runs out: We are a faculty that has a larger awareness and deeper understanding about the dynamics of teaching and learning.

Also, our building has become intensely unified about our beliefs and practices. During the proposal phase of this grant, 100% of the faculty signed their affirmation, and they did not waiver one bit throughout the implementation phase. Westlawn teachers all shared in the formulation of our program. They researched, discussed, reflected, and even argued a bit. It took time, but in the end it was theirs—a product from their own hearts and minds. It was not an agenda forced upon them from a principal, curriculum director, or even a small group of influential teachers. And when the money came, no one was surprised or unwilling when the very hard work to implement this program began. These teachers knew exactly what they were about—and they did it. As their principal, I learned my role was to be more supportive than directive, more enabling than managing, and, when things went wrong, to inspire more than criticize.

It was a large amount of money for our school to receive. The resources it allowed us to purchase are vast. However, none of it would have made the difference if it had not been for a sharp and focused vision developed by the teachers themselves. Money is certainly nice—but money without a dream attached to it falls short on impact. I-READ inspired us to dream, and now we are working and living our dream everyday.

### DONNA GEESAMAN, Literacy Collaborative Coach:

Allington and Cunningham stated in their book, *Schools That Work: Where All Children Read and Write* (1996) that, "Schools must become sites where teachers more often work collegially in a problem-solving framework focused on improving instructional practice. . [and] creating such support for teachers through professional development is the first step toward creating that school where all children become readers and writers." We believe at Westlawn that this quote has become a reality. I-READ gave us the money to have someone trained from our building at Purdue University in Literacy Collaborative for coaching and for providing on-site professional development in literacy instruction for grades K-3. Teachers meet with the coach building-wide every 2 weeks to discuss topics in literacy and to bring theory and practice together in a way that makes classroom teaching more effective and enjoyable. Colleagues reflect on and analyze their teaching and offer mutual support for new learning.

Teachers in the past have been introduced to new techniques at seminars and then they became frustrated and confused when they tried these new ideas alone in their classrooms. I-READ allowed teachers to have a literacy coach to support them in trying new strategies in teaching of reading and writing. At Westlawn, we are continually collecting and analyzing formal and informal data on our students to assess the effectiveness of our teaching and then addressing this information in our professional development classes. This allows our school to have the capacity for continuous improvement. I believe on-site professional development and coaching in schools is vital to making a difference in students' learning.

### LINDA BURKHARDT, I-READ Coach:

Being able to have a print-rich environment in our school has made a tremendous difference. Walking into the school and viewing our hallway book displays lets all visitors know how wonderful and important we think reading is. With our leveled-book library reaching well over one thousand different titles, students have had the opportunity to read several books at one level, ensuring they are ready to move on to the next level. First grade teachers, in particular, have been amazed at the number of books their students have read this year—as many as 150 different titles per student.

Our students really are readers and writers as demonstrated by this story written by a kindergarten student:

#### The Red Mittens

Once upon a time there was a cat, a raccoon, and a dog.

Dog and cat were not friends.

The cat and the dog loved the color red.

Raccoon had an idea.

He decided to give them red mittens.

He would write from dog on the one that he would send to cat and the other way around. And they became friends.

All of the things we have mentioned thus far have been extremely important, but we are most proud of how our parent involvement has grown and prospered through I-READ. Prior to this grant, parents visited the school to gripe and complain. Now, they are constructively involved in the education process as they listen to children read and help make materials for parent literacy workshops and teachers' classrooms. During the past two years, a genuine partnership has been forged between the teaching staff and parents. They many hours parents have donated to our school have made such a difference in the quality of instruction we have been able to provide to our students. These same hours have made a monumental difference in how our parents now perceive Westlawn. Their pride in this elementary school now equals ours. Dr. Andis and I-READ will forever be credited with turning this low-performing school into an award-winning school.

#### **BEYOND ISTEP+**

#### MARY ANDIS:

In talking with school administrators who have had short-term grants during the past few years, I learned that if a grant brings about a change in the school culture, the grant will have a lasting impact. It is not surprising then that a more complete picture of performance in I-READ schools emerges from the observation reports by reading experts that I requested in November 2003. Noting evidence for change in the school culture, their observational reports suggest that the grant has had a positive impact in all but a handful of schools.

One school with a positive impact is Muessel Primary Center in South Bend. While not a Demonstration School this year, Muessel exhibits all the characteristics of school culture change that result in future literacy achievement. In fact, the South Bend School Corporation has designated Muessel as a Lab School so that others in the corporation can see an exemplary literacy program in action.

I have asked Carol Levee, Sally Carlin, and Margery Walz here today to share their insights on how the I-READ grant has helped Muessel become a Lab School.

## Muessel Primary Center, South Bend, IN

South Bend Community School Corporation, St. Joseph County

### CAROL LEVEE, Principal:

During school year 2001-2002, our staff decided we needed to study best practice in reading and writing in order to more positively affect our students' progress and increase our standardized test scores. We worked with central office personnel and Sally Carlin to write a grant that would assist us with this task. We were awarded the I-READ grant and began our professional development and implementation of learned strategies during school year 2002-2003 with Sally Carlin as our reading coach. That same year we wrote our PL221 plan integrating it with the I-READ grant. Title I funds also were available to assist us with our goal.

School year 2002-2003 proved exciting. Once we began implementing the components of the Balanced Literacy Framework outlined in our grant, we saw a change in our students' beliefs about reading, writing, and themselves. The more they read and wrote, the better they became. In addition, they liked what they were doing. We established many positive incentive programs that encouraged reading. We reported to students and families the increase in the number of books checked out of our library from the previous year. We displayed student writing throughout the building. We began building a community of readers and writers.

Then, as school year 2003-2004 began, we were faced with new challenges. Our school district changed residential boundaries and grade structure at the elementary level. Muessel Elementary became a Primary Center, housing grades K-4. Of the approximately 600 students who enrolled last fall, 500 were new to our site. In addition, the staff grew by 50 % with only ten teachers remaining from our initial year of the grant. These challenges have been met head on, however. It has taken a great deal of work and dedication by the staff, but we continue to learn and grow. More importantly, we have witnessed tremendous progress with our students.

### SALLY CARLIN, I-READ Coach:

As Carol mentioned, this year of grant implementation brought incredible, but rewarding, challenges. Year one had ushered in exciting changes in instructional practice and environment, and we planned to keep that momentum going. We scheduled double the staff development sessions. For returning teachers, this training followed our initial grant proposal and focused on comprehension instruction and writing. New teachers were offered professional development, beginning with year-one content, that proceeded at an accelerated pace. Our returning teachers, trained during year one of the grant, served as mentors and additional coaches for the new staff. They were viewed as experts in balanced literacy, and, while coaching others, their learning rose to a new level. An environment of collegiality, inquiry, and developing leadership was fostered. By May, all staff had been equally trained. In addition, funds had been directed in the beginning of the year to ensure that all new classrooms were well equipped for balanced literacy.

Our efforts to improve both instruction and environment and our culture of continual learning and inquiry were recognized in January when we were designated a Lab School for our district. Eight of our ten returning teachers were chosen to serve as models. These teachers received intensive coaching sessions, including additional demonstration, observation, and feedback from the I-READ coach. In February, the Lab School opened.

A typical lab day brought thirty to forty teachers from throughout the district to our school. A brief question and answer session, facilitated by the I-READ coach, curriculum leader, and principal, followed. Lab sessions were understood to be essentially awareness sessions. The desire at the district level was to get teachers talking and thinking. Follow-up was offered with the help of district-level personnel.

### MARGERY WALZ, Curriculum Facilitator:

As we look forward to the next school year, we are expending our efforts. We will be offering 16 additional classes for observation and will be increasing the time observers spend in each classroom. We are redesigning our Lab School to extend visiting participants a full week of observation, demonstrations, discussions, planning, and team teaching in order to provide teachers with a working knowledge of the complete Balanced Literacy Framework. The first teachers to participate will be the grade level team leaders from the other primary centers within our district. These instructors have already completed two years of training provided by the Reading Success Network and are, therefore, knowledgeable about Balanced Literacy and its framework. They will then return to their schools with the intention of not only putting into practice the Balanced Literacy Framework in their own classrooms but also assisting their fellow teammates with the application of this model. We at Muessel Primary Center, being both a Title I school and an I-READ recipient are totally committed to the Balanced Literacy Framework. We are proud of the successes of our students and staff the past two years. Opening our doors and classrooms to provide the type of internship to fellow teachers will help to extend these successes to every elementary student in the South Bend Community School Corporation.

## **CONCLUSION**

#### MARY ANDIS:

There are 21 Demonstration Schools that have a continuous pattern of improving literacy scores on the Grade 3 ISTEP+. These schools can serve as lab schools in a corporation, as exemplary models for other Indiana schools, and as examples of university partnerships that provide ongoing, on-site professional development.

The analysis of observational data and narrative reports, in addition, has suggested that most I-READ schools, such as Muessel Primary Center, now have the instructional materials, literacy-rich environments, and professional development frameworks that they can use to bring about desired change and literacy improvement long after the end of the grant period.

I want to end with this comment. The most significant finding from the I-READ grant experience is that successful literacy programs need to have a school-wide vision for literacy achievement that leads to teachers and students who eventually become self-motivated, empowered, and independent learners.